



Appleton Public Library Needs Assessment

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Background

- Social work and public libraries share similarities:
 - Focus on serving the public
 - Shared values (Schweizer, 2018; Zettervall & Nienow, 2019)
 - Changing roles in conjunction with changing economic and social times
- Historical changes affecting public libraries:
 - Deinstitutionalization in the 1960's brought increases in people experiencing homelessness and/or mental illness (Cart, 1992; Torrey, Esposito, & Geller, 2009).
 - The Great Recession of the 21st century brought an increase in people experiencing challenges related to poverty (Jaeger et al., 2014).
 - Shortage of emergency shelter beds (Henry et al., 2018)
 - Increasing municipal statutes that criminalize homelessness (National Law Center for Homelessness and Poverty, 2016)



Background

- ◉ Public libraries have been called “de facto shelters” and librarians “de facto social workers” (Cathcart, 2008, p. 89).
- ◉ Library staff have conflicting feelings about this change (Ayers, 2006; Cronon, 2002; Hersberger, 2005).
- ◉ Most library staff do not have training to assess or intervene with psychosocial problems (Anderson, Simpson, & Fisher, 2012).



What kinds of things are you seeing at APL that you feel you don't have training to handle?

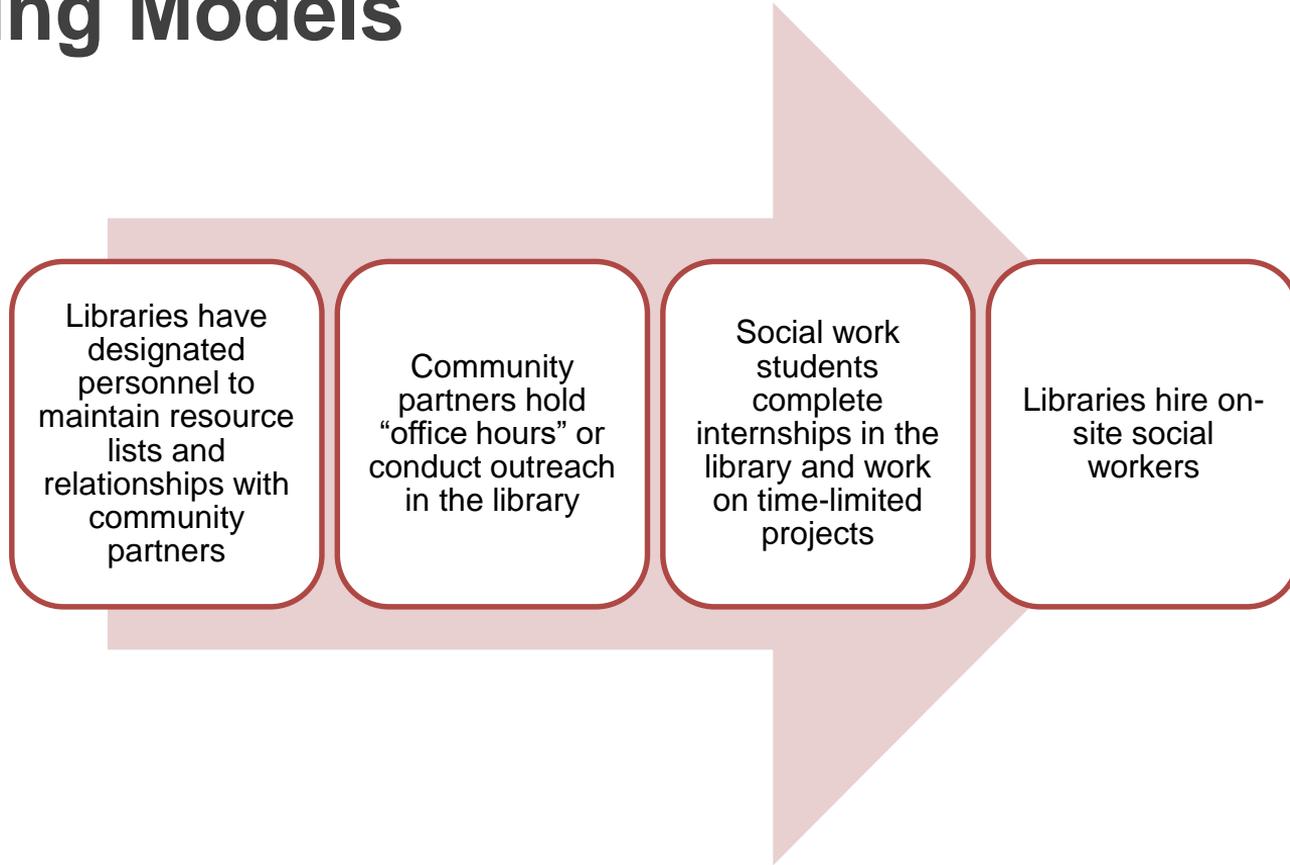


Background

- ⦿ There's a growing movement to partner social work services with public libraries across the US and Canada
- ⦿ Many different models
- ⦿ This is NOT to say that public libraries are to become social service organizations!
- ⦿ Focuses instead on a different type of information needs, and “relationships as the new reference collection” (Zettervall & Nienow, 2019)



Existing Models



Planned Needs Assessment for APL

- ⊙ Two phases:
 - Survey of staff (Fall 2019)- 55 participants
 - Survey of patrons (upcoming, Spring 2020)

- ⊙ Results from the staff survey in this presentation, along with possible recommendations



Questions to be Answered:

- ⊙ What do APL staff perceive to be the most significant psychosocial needs of patrons?
- ⊙ What do APL staff perceive to be the role of the library regarding meeting psychosocial needs of patrons?
- ⊙ How well is APL meeting patrons' psychosocial needs?
- ⊙ What do APL patrons perceive to be their most significant needs?
- ⊙ What steps could APL take to better address these needs?



Results: Perceived Patron Needs (n=55)

Identified Need	Frequency/Percentage
Mental health	49 (89.1%)
Substance abuse	38 (69.1%)
Housing	34 (61.8%)
Employment	30 (54.5%)
Behavior problems (manners)	28 (50.9%)
Financial	25 (45.5%)
Hygiene	23 (41.8%)
Medical/Health-related	22 (40.0%)
Relationship/Interpersonal issues	16 (29.1%)
Social connection/isolation	15 (27.3%)
Parenting/Child-related	14 (25.5%)
Transportation	12 (21.8%)
Education or literacy	11 (20.0%)
Food/nutrition	11 (20.0%)
Immigration/ESL	8 (14.5%)
Technology (access to or education about)	7 (12.7%)
Safe activities for teens	7 (12.7%)
Physical (related to disability or physical ability)	6 (10.9%)
Clothing	3 (5.5%)
Entertainment	1 (1.8%)



Results: Perceived Library Role- Provide Information

	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do public libraries have to provide the following types of information:	
	1=None at all
	2= A little
	3 = A moderate amount
	4 = A lot
	5 = A great deal
Information about poverty-related community agencies (food banks, housing shelters, low-cost medical providers, etc.)	4.04 (1.02)
Information about mental health problems (depression, anxiety, etc.)	3.67 (1.05)
Information about substance abuse problems	3.57 (1.01)
Information about medical problems (diabetes, heart disease, etc.)	3.54 (1.12)



Results: Perceived Library Role- Offer Services

	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do libraries have to offer the following services:	
	1=None at all
	2= A little
	3 = A moderate amount
	4 = A lot
	5 = A great deal
Referrals to community resources (such as those for mental health, substance abuse, or health problems)	3.83 (1.10)
Assistance applying for public benefits (food stamps, health insurance, or social security)	2.67 (1.11)
Free food for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty	1.93 (.96)
Winter items for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty (coats, gloves, hats, etc.)	1.93 (.98)
Hygiene items for people who are experiencing homelessness or poverty	1.83 (.92)



Results: Perceived Library Role- Provide Programming

	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do public libraries have to provide the following types of programming:	
	1=None at all
	2= A little
	3 = A moderate amount
	4 = A lot
	5 = A great deal
Workshops on community resources	3.70 (1.14)
Workshops on how to access public benefits	3.38 (1.22)
Workshops on budgeting or finances	3.15 (1.11)
Workshops on mental health problems	3.04 (1.13)
Workshops on substance abuse problems	2.94 (1.14)
Support groups	2.94 (1.22)
Workshops on common medical problems	2.77 (1.06)



Results: Perceived Library Role- Allow Activities

Question: In your opinion, how much responsibility do libraries have to allow the following	Mean (Standard Deviation)
	1=None at all 2= A little 3 = A moderate amount 4 = A lot 5 = A great deal
Poverty or homelessness-related agencies to come in the library for outreach services to their clients	4.00 (1.04)
People who are experiencing homelessness to use the library to stay warm in the winter or cool in the summer	3.98 (1.03)
Community agencies to use library facilities for pre-scheduled meetings with their clients	3.86 (1.14)
People who are experiencing homelessness to use the library bathrooms for washing/hygiene	2.33 (1.25)
People who are experiencing homelessness to nap (in a chair) in the library	1.80 (1.01)



Results: Who Should Provide Non-Traditional Services?

Provider	Frequency/Percentage
Partnerships with external community agencies	48 (87.3%)
Social service professional(s) hired by the library	42 (76.4%)
Trained librarians or other library staff	19 (34.5%)
None of the above – These services or programs should not be provided in or by a public library	4 (7.3%)

Results: How well is APL meeting these needs?

Response	Frequency/Percentage
Not well at all	3 (5.5%)
Slightly well	13 (23.6%)
Moderately well	31 (56.4%)
Very well	4 (7.3%)
Extremely well	1 (1.8%)



Suggestions about things APL could do different to better meet patrons' needs re: poverty/homelessness:

Response	Frequency/Percentage
Walk-throughs by service providers to check on patrons experiencing homelessness	46 (83.6%)
List of community agencies and contact information	44 (80.0%)
Designated days/times for homeless service providers to meet with patrons experiencing homelessness	42 (76.4%)
Assistance signing up for housing programs	35 (63.6%)
Assistance signing up for public benefits like BadgerCare, TANF (“Wisconsin Works”), or FoodShare benefits (“food stamps”)	34 (61.8%)
Hygiene items	23 (41.8%)
Children and family meal programs	22 (40.0%)
Warm items such as blankets, hats, gloves, or coats	19 (34.5%)
Snacks/food	18 (32.7%)



Suggestions about things APL could do different to better meet patrons' needs re: MH/SA/Med Probs:

Response	Frequency/Percentage
List of community agencies and contact information	46 (83.6%)
Designated days and times for select service providers to meet with patrons experiencing these issues	42 (76.4%)
Workshops by service providers	41 (74.5%)
Private room for patrons to discuss personal issues	36 (65.5%)
Assistance signing up for health insurance/BadgerCare	36 (65.5%)
Assistance signing up for SSI/SSDI (“disability”)	33 (60.0%)



Suggestions about things APL could do different to better meet patrons' needs re: MH/SA/Med Probs:

- ⊙ Allow people to bring in bags
- ⊙ Have regular access to a social worker/ community resource person
- ⊙ Have better organized info on hand or designated staff for patrons with these needs
- ⊙ Try to raise the tolerance level of other patrons
- ⊙ Provide bus vouchers



Suggestions about things APL could do different to better meet patrons' needs re: MH/SA/Med Probs:

- ⦿ Clarify expectations of staff
- ⦿ Provide parenting workshops and incentivize participation with diapers or bus passes
- ⦿ Provide resources such as grocery coupons, food, or warm clothing to patrons in need
- ⦿ Provide designated areas for sleeping or hygiene



Next Steps

- ◉ An MSW student from UW- Oshkosh will be doing her practicum here in the Spring semester
- ◉ She and I will partner for the patron survey portion of the needs assessment
- ◉ She will also be collecting ongoing data about needs during her practicum
- ◉ I'll make final recommendations after the patron survey is complete



For additional suggestions, thoughts, and/or questions:

Please contact me!

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Questions?